

Amendments to the Specification

Kindly replace the original specification with the enclosed substitute specification.

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SUBSTITUTE SPECIFICATION**DESCRIPTION****A Tablet Feeder****BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****1. Technical Field**

5 The present invention relates to a tablet feeder.

2. Description of the Related Art

Conventionally, there is a tablet feeder composed of a case support table on which a motor is placed, and a tablet storage case which can be mounted on or dismounted from the case support table. In this kind of table feeder, when the motor is driven, a rotor disposed inside the tablet storage case is rotated via a plurality of gears so that tablets contained in its pockets can be discharged through a delivery passage.

In this tablet feeder, the tablets discharged from the tablet storage case are counted by a counting sensor provided on the delivery passage. There are a type of the counting sensor which maintains an ON state regardless of the mounting 20 of the tablet storage case on the case support table, and a type of the counting sensor which is switched to the ON state only when the tablet storage case is mounted.

However, the counting sensor which constantly maintains

an ON state may suffer erroneous operation due to external perturbations such as light from a fluorescent lamp while the tablet storage case is detached from the case support table. Also, the counting sensor which is switched to the ON state 5 only when the tablet storage case is mounted on the case support table may suffer errors in the delivery quantity if tablets are accidentally dropped off before the mounting on the tablet storage case is completed and so these tablets are not detectable.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a tablet feeder capable of surely preventing erroneous operation from occurring due to the 15 mounting and dismounting of the tablet storage case on and from the case support table.

In the present invention, as a means to solve the above problem, there is provided a tablet feeder in which tablets are delivered from a tablet storage case mounted on a case 20 support table, and when the tablets are passed through a delivery passage formed in the case support table, the quantity of the passed tablets is counted by a counting means.

The tablet feeder includes case detection means for

outputting a detection signal from the start of mounting of the tablet storage case on the case support table, so that the counting means is kept in an OFF state until a start state of mounting of the tablet storage case is detected by 5 the case detection means and is set to an ON state after detection.

With this constitution, in the state of the tablet storage case being demounted from the case support table, the counting means can be kept in the OFF state, which makes it 10 possible to reduce unnecessary power consumption and also ensures prevention of the erroneous operation by the counting means due to external perturbations. Further, when the tablet storage case is mounted on the case support table, the counting means is set to the ON state immediately after the 15 start of mounting. Therefore, even if tablets are accidentally dropped off from the tablet storage case, it becomes possible to reliably count the tablets by the counting means when the tablets are passed through the delivery passage, thereby preventing errors in the delivery 20 quantity from occurring.

The tablet storage case may be provided with an information display section for displaying information about tablets to be stored, and the case support table may be

provided with identification means for detecting the information display section, so that the identification means is kept in the OFF state until a start state of mounting of the tablet storage case is detected by the case detection 5 means and is set to the ON state after detection.

With this constitution, a placement position of the identification means can be determined with disregard to potential adverse influences of external perturbations.

The counting means should preferably be set to the ON 10 state based on the detection signal from the case detection means after passing of noise influence time, which allows further prevention of detection errors by the counting means. Further, the case detection means may be capable of separately detecting a state from a start of mounting of the tablet 15 storage case on the case support table to a middle of the mounting and a state from the middle of the mounting to an end of the mounting.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

20 FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view showing a tablet feeder according to the present embodiment;

FIG. 2 is a plan view showing a case support table shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a cross sectional view showing a tablet storage case shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a bottom view showing the tablet storage case shown in FIG. 1;

5 FIG. 5 is a perspective view showing a tablet feeding apparatus on which the tablet feeder shown in FIG. 1 is installed;

FIG. 6 is a perspective view showing another tablet feeding apparatus on which the tablet feeder shown in FIG. 1
10 is installed; and

FIG. 7 is a time chart showing on/off states of a case detection means, a counting means and an identification means.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

15 Embodiments of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 shows a tablet feeder 1 according to the present embodiment. The tablet feeder 1 is mounted on both sides or one side of a plurality of drawer articles 100 which can be pulled out and are installed on a drawer case-type tablet feeding apparatus 2A shown in FIG. 5, or mounted on the outer side of inner and outer double drums 101, 102 which are rotatably supported on upper and lower end sections and

installed on a drum-type tablet feeding apparatus 2B shown in FIG. 6.

The tablet feeder 1 is composed of case support tables 3, which are placed on the drawer articles 100 of the tablet feeding apparatus 2A or a drum 102 of the tablet feeding apparatus 2B, and tablet storage cases 4 which can be mounted on or dismounted from the case support tables 3.

As shown in FIG. 2, the case support table 3 has guide sections 6a, 6b disposed side by side at a specified interval 10 on an upper surface. On the respective side surfaces of the guide sections 6a, 6b, a locking section 6c is provided in a protruding state. On the surface of one guide section 6a, an identification sensor 7 is provided. Herein, the identification sensor 7 uses a transmission sensor made up of 15 plural pairs of a light emitting element and a light receiving element. The identification sensor 7, as described later, is used to detect a bar code 18 put on the tablet storage case 4 and automatically identify tablets housed in the tablet storage cases 4. It is to be noted that magnetic 20 sensors such as hall ICs are also adaptable. Moreover, on the side surface of the other guide section 6b, there is formed a semiconductor pattern 8, which makes it possible to detect mounting and dismounting states of the tablet storage

case 4 on and from the case support table 3. Moreover, a delivery passage 9 is formed in the case support table 3. A counting sensor 10 is provided on the delivery passage 9, which allows counting of the passing tablets. The counting 5 sensor 10 herein uses a transmission sensor made up of a light emitting element and a light receiving element. Further, a motor 11 which is drive-controlled in response to a control signal from a control unit (not shown) is housed inside the case support table 3. A rotating shaft of the 10 motor 11 protrudes from the top surface of the case support table 3, and a protruded portion is integrated with a drive gear 12. It is to be noted that the passage of electric current through the identification sensor 7 and the counting sensor 10 are controlled so that the identification sensor 7 15 and the counting sensor 10 are set to the ON state immediately after the start of mounting of the tablet storage case 4 on the case support table 3 or after passing of a certain time as described later.

The tablet storage case 4 is almost in a box shape, and 20 its top surface can be opened and closed with a cover article 13. The upper surface of the bottom wall of the tablet storage case 4 is formed almost into a conical shape, in which a rotor 14 is disposed.

A plurality of groove-shaped pocket sections 15 extending in vertical direction are formed equiangularly on the external surface of the rotor 14. The pocket section 15 has a width and a depth that allows retention of only one 5 tablet that is stored. A rotating shaft of the rotor 14 protrudes from the lower surface of the bottom wall of the tablet storage case 4, and is integrated with a driven gear 16.

Moreover, on the bottom surface of the tablet storage 10 case 4, there are formed guide reception sections 17 which are guided by the guide sections 6 of the case support table 3. On the guide reception sections 17, there is respectively formed an elastic locking reception section 17a which is locked with and unlocked from the locking section 6c formed 15 on each of the guide sections 6a, 6b. A bar code 18 (equivalent to the information display section of this embodiment) detected by the identification sensor 7 is provided on one inner side surface of the guide reception section 17. The bar code 18 corresponds to the kind of 20 tablet stored in the tablet storage case 4, and information about the tablet such as the kind of the tablet is displayed on a display section (not shown) based on a detection result of the bar code 18 by the identification sensor 7.

Further, on the other inner side surface of the guide reception section 17, a metal plate 19 is electrically connected to the conductive pattern 8. The metal plate 19 and the conductive pattern 8 constitute the case detection 5 means of the present invention.

The counting sensor 10 may be set to the ON state immediately upon contact of the metal plate 19 with the conductive pattern 8, or may be set to the ON state after passing of an estimated time necessary for noise influence 10 due to external perturbations such as light from a fluorescent lamp to disappear at the time of starting mounting of the tablet storage case 4 on the case support table 3. In the latter case, however, if tablets should be dropped off from the tablet storage cases 4 during a period 15 from the start to the end of the mounting of the tablet storage cases 4 on the case support tables 3, it is necessary that the dropped tablets can be detected by the counting sensor 10.

Description is now given of the operation of the above- 20 structured tablet feeder 1.

When the tablet storage case 4 is dismounted from the case support table 3, the metal plate 19 is moved out of contact with the conductive pattern 8, so that the ON state

of the identification sensor 7 and the counting sensor 10 are maintained. This prevents erroneous detection by the identification sensor 7 or the counting sensor 10 due to external perturbations such as light from a fluorescent lamp.

5 When the tablet storage case 4 is mounted on the case support table 3, as shown in FIG. 7, the conductive pattern 8 comes into contact with the metal plate 19 immediately after the start of mounting, and both the identification sensor 7 and the counting sensor 10 are set to the ON state. However,
10 as described before, they may be set to the ON state after passing of a time during which noise is generated due to the influence of external perturbations immediately after the start of mounting of the tablet storage case 4 on the case support table 3. This makes it possible to surely detect the
15 tablets passing through the delivery passage by the counting sensor 10 even when the tablet storage case 4 is mounted on the case support table 3.

Although in the aforementioned embodiment, the case detection means is composed of a combination of the
20 conductive pattern 8 and the metal plate 19 which is simply for obtaining electrical conduction, various means such magnetic sensors including hall elements and MR elements as well as limit switches are also applicable.

Further, in the aforementioned embodiment, the conductive pattern 8 and the metal plate 19 are set to constantly maintain a conductive state immediately after the start of mounting of the tablet storage case 4. However, it 5 is also possible to structure the sensors so that with partial disconnection of the conductive pattern 8 for example, a state from the start of the mounting of the tablet storage case 4 to the middle of the mounting and a state from the middle of the mounting to the end of the mounting may be 10 separately detected. Consequently, even if the identification sensor 7 as disclosed in the aforementioned embodiment is adopted, it becomes possible to prevent such failure as erroneous detection by the identification sensor 7 when the tablet storage case 4 is not fully mounted on the 15 case support table 3.